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## Rehberg beats back bison buffer zone amendment

**By The Associated Press**

WASHINGTON - Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., fought back an effort by a New York congressman to address the brucellosis problem around Yellowstone National Park with a buffer zone advocated by Montana's governor.

Democratic Rep. Maurice Hinchey on Thursday offered an amendment to an agriculture spending bill based on a plan from Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer.

The buffer zones would attempt to better separate livestock from bison that carry the disease, which infected a Montana cattle herd northeast of the park in May.

Hinchey's amendment would also have encouraged the Agriculture Department to spend \$1.5 million to help finance an agreement with the Royal Teton Ranch, owned by the Church Universal and Triumphant, to allow diseased bison to graze on that property.

Hinchey mentioned Schweitzer's support for the plan in his amendment and in his remarks at the committee meeting.

But Rehberg objected, saying Schweitzer, a Democrat, is "really the only policymaker advocating this plan." The committee defeated the amendment.

Rehberg has advocated the current bison management plan, which was designed by the state of Montana, the National Park Service and the Department of Agriculture. It is designed to reduce the risk of brucellosis and allows the slaughter of bison, along with hunting of some animals outside the park. He has opposed the buffer zone idea, saying the problem should be dealt with inside the park.

The issue, Rehberg said, "is very serious for the Montana cattle industry, and we need to take the time to build consensus and get it right."

Brucellosis causes pregnant cows to abort their fetuses. It causes a recurring fever in humans, but exposure is relatively rare and limited primarily to livestock producers and veterinarians.

Montana, which ranks sixth in the United States for total number of beef cows, is now on probation for two years and will lose its brucellosis-free status if any further cases turn up during that time.

Hinchey said he is will keep trying to push the plan.

"The bison is an American icon that is worthy of our efforts to protect it," he said. "It is absolutely critical that we find a way to ensure Montana maintains its brucellosis-free status while at the same time work to protect the bison in Yellowstone, which symbolize the greatness and beauty of the park."

A separate committee held a hearing on the issue earlier this year. Rep. Nick Rahall, the West Virginia Democrat who is chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, has said he is adamantly opposed to the "murder" of Yellowstone bison.

Rahall has long opposed slaughtering bison that wander outside the park and has in the past tried to stop it.

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